

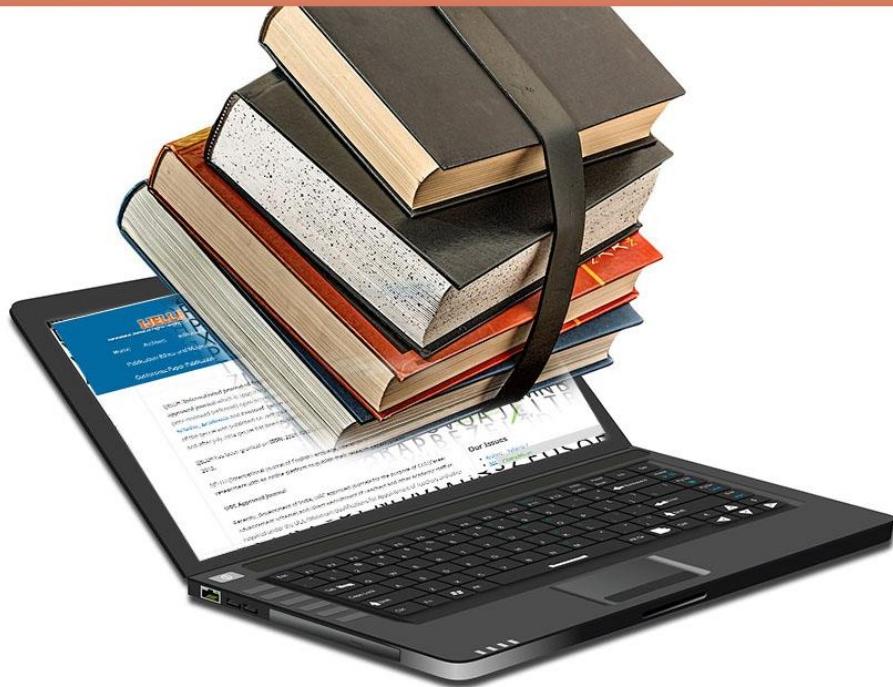
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### Triumphant Women: A Study Of Shashi Deshpande's *In The Country Of Deceit*

#### Abstract

Both the novels, *Moving On* (2004) and *In the Country of Deceit* (2008) are a complete departure from Deshpande's earlier fictional works. While in the earlier novels, women protagonists exhibit abhorrence for the bodily pleasures, here, for the first time, they talk about bodily desires openly without any inhibitions. The protagonists of both the above-mentioned novels are bold, courageous and more liberated than their earlier counterparts and one can see characters like Baba, Manjari, Devi, and Sindhu talking about the demands of the body in quite a natural way. The characters try to achieve self-fulfillment by challenging the imposed socio-cultural norms and do not hesitate in taking decisions of their life. They have full faith in their capabilities and do not blame others for their present condition. The present paper is an attempt to show how the male and female protagonists of the novel *In The Country of Deceit* defies all social norms and infuses optimism in their lives in spite of so many adversities.

Key words: bodily desires, socio-cultural norms, liberation

The novel *In the Country of Deceit* is a solicitous examination of the nature of love in the midst of sufferings, deceptions and evasions in the life of its protagonist Devyani Mudhol (Devi), an English teacher, who chooses to exercise her hard-won independence in her own way. Like Manjari of *Moving On*, Devi also is a woman of free spirit and has a liberated view

of life, as is evident in her decision to live alone in a small village of Rajnur, before she is enticed into a relationship that has no future. The present novel also emphasizes the need for bodily desires in the respective life of men and women in the story. The novel depicts the struggles of many female characters like Devi, Sindhu, Kusum and Rani, and their potential to survive all odds in life, challenging various social taboos and marriage codes. The articulation of the female protagonist takes a full circle here in the form of Devyani's disapproval of family and friends and her choice to marry a person much older to her and already married. Deshpande has tried to depict various moods of unhappiness, disappointment, tension, the conflict between tradition and modernity, as well as negative forces working together.

The value of human relationships occupies a central place in the novel. The title of the novel *In the Country of Deceit* is in itself symbolic of presenting an atmosphere of treachery, evasions, and pessimism in the background of the strong emotion of love and faith in a relationship. The novel is about love between an adult man and woman. Although the writer has dealt with the idea of love in other novels as well, but except for one or two early attempts, she has never come out with a story that is entirely based upon this idea. If the desire for body was the governing factor in the novel *Moving On*, the desire for love constitutes the theme of the present novel.

The demolishing of the old house after the death of their parents by Devyani, the protagonist, and her sister Savitri and construction of the new house in its place shows the positive outlook of both sisters. It is an attempt to come out of the clutches of bad memories of their mother's illness and father's suicide. The architecture of the new home with large, spacious, airy rooms in contrast to a narrow and dark room of their previous house suggests their tendency to move forward in life. They don't want a single trace of negativity in their present life. So, the beginning of the novel is suggestive of their decision to forget the life of sickness, failure, and suffering of their parents. The concept of the new house is related with

the demolition of the traditional system and reshaping of the modern ethics. The new house appears as a promise of a new beginning for both sisters, and they celebrate it ‘like veterans’: “Savi and I clinked our glasses like veterans. It was more than a social gesture; we were promising ourselves we would make it a happy house, we would put a closure to the memories of sadness and pain” (6). Both sisters wanted to obliterate all traces of their parent’s frustration, pain, and negativity in their lives, as expressed by Devi in the novel: “‘Ground zero’. It was I who said the words. And, in spite of the death knell sound of the words, in spite of their association with destruction… For us, this was not an end, but a beginning. A fresh start. A clean slate”(1).

Devi, an unmarried twenty-seven years old woman, has spent all her life in taking care of her ailing mother; she is the only one who knows that her father has committed suicide. She has faced the bleak and gloomy side of the life, always playing the role of an “accompanist to other people’s lives”(8). Now she is happy with herself as she expresses: “Now, for the first time, I had to play solo. I had no one else to look after, no one to think about. I felt as if I was waiting for the curtain to go up, waiting for something to happen”(8). She spends her time, teaching English to a few students and trying to create her beautiful garden with a frog-pond: “ ‘I am happy. My garden is blooming. Everything I planted has come up. The right amount of rain, right amount of sun. I feel blessed’(164). However, her life takes a turn with her friendship with Rani, a former actress, who settles there with her husband and children. Devyani, in spite of her family’s disapproval, seems to be enthralled by the carefree life of Rani and this friendship paves the way for her entry into the world of love and eventually into the country of deceit.

Rani introduces Devyani to Ashok, DSP of Rajnur district, who instantly falls in love with her. It is strange that Devyani, who never liked the idea of getting married, fails to resist Ashok’s attraction towards her. His face keeps haunting her despite her inner fears: “...I am

frightened, not of the man, but of myself, of my desire to run, not away from him, but into his arms" (94). She knows from the very beginning that this relationship, which is against all societal norms, has no future. Her desire gives rise to a dilemma in her mind, and Ashok's promise of giving her love and honesty puts her in a conflicting situation: "I didn't know what I care about....what was wrong with me?"(95). After going through this internal conflict, she accepts Ashok's love which is 'more than joy' and 'bliss' for her: "Only this man could give me such ecstasy, only he could give me such joy with his lovemaking. Ananda Sindhu had called it. Yes, more than joy. Bliss.... It was this man, not the sex. This man's love, not the sex. And yet, the sex too" (193). She keeps oscillating between her true and intense love for Ashok and her moral consciousness. Although Devi's love for Ashok is pure and genuine that needs no demands or promises from each other, the guilt in Devi arises out of the pressures of social conventions. They accept each other unconditionally. She is conscious of her bodily desires and gradually comes to realize the meaning and importance of marriage. She says: "I lay in bed wide awake, conscious of my body in its nightdress, thinking, that's the point of marriage. Sex without guilt. Sex without any strings attached. Sex without fear" (77).

Shashi Deshpande, in this novel, dares to build up articulation around a topic that our society tends to confine within the walls of shame and embarrassment. Although sexuality constitutes an important place for man and woman, it is considered as a taboo for a woman in a traditional society. Like in the earlier novel *Moving On*, the characters like Sindhu and Devi emphasize the need for sexual fulfillment in life. As Sindhu puts forth:

Body is important and so are the demands of the body...( And yet, do you know that there is a line in the Upanishad which says that the generating organ is the centre of all pleasures?... And they use the word ananda,... Remember, this is a very natural feeling, a very natural desire and you have a right to expect your life to contain this ananda as well. (42-43)

Devyani feels immense joy and contentment in the company of Ashok. Her entire body is filled with “unadulterated joy.” She says: “He began to trace my features with his fingers-my eyebrows my nose, my chin, my lips. I could never have imagined that such a gentle touch, a touch so light that I could scarcely feel it, could evoke such a strong response from my body”(132). Along with this ecstasy comes the social and psychological constraints associated with these sexual urges, which make her feel: “...I had entered the country of deceit. I could no longer be open with people I loved; I had to deceive them”(147). Her love for Ashok is considered as a way to quench their sexual desires by Savi and Shree who become furious when they come to know about this adulterous relationship. Savi asserts: “..you should have said you want to get married, you could have avoided this-this disgusting thing you’re doing. I never thought you would do such a dirty thing, just for sex...”(184). Similarly, Shree was shocked to learn about this whole situation and holds her responsible for stigmatizing their family. Such a relationship is not for a respectable woman like Devyani: “I was angry, very angry. I thought of our families, yours and mine, of Aba and Mai, I thought of your name and reputation. How could you, Devyani, I thought how could you!”(196)

It is a sheer irony that a woman is expected to control her sexual urges to guard her family honor. This constitutes a denial of her right to give expression to her bodily desires. Any discussion related to their bodily desires is considered as a silent affair for women, and it remains unarticulated. Devyani herself contemplates “The word love can’t change anything. It is not a detergent that can wash out the strains. The wrong remains a wrong”(236). Devyani’s belief in an honest relationship and her inherent goodness compels her to think about right and wrong. She can’t bear the thought of becoming a second woman in the life of Ashok. She returns the gift that Ashok brings for her birthday, saying: “ ‘I feel as if I’m being paid’” (209). Devyani is a woman of clear vision. Her love for Ashok is so intense that she even agrees to live with this guilt: “...I would even learn to live with guilt. You get used to everything- you

learn how to live with suffering, pain, death. Why not with guilt then? Yes, I would learn to cope with guilt as well"(152). She appears as a strong-willed character who can withstand the pressures of the desires of her body and her love for Ashok, but she is affected by other characters in the novel who fail to hold their emotions against the infidelity of their partner. KN's mother is betrayed by her husband who was a school teacher and who ran away with his colleague. His betrayal ruined her life to such an extent that this deceit becomes an inseparable part of her being: "She had forgotten nothing- neither her pain, nor her suffering, nor her hatred of the other woman"(162). As Devyani observes that though the world has forgotten the incident, the entire story of her husband's betrayal and related anger and pain is still intact: "...It was like watching her tear off a bandage, revealing a wound that was still raw, still sore, still bleeding" (162). This infidelity of her husband destroys her trust in life and relationship. The whole action affects her soul and turns her into a stone-hearted "terrible woman" (161).

Further, *In the Country of Deceit*, it is not only the woman who suffers this torture of betrayal by her husband, the writer equally brings out the detrimental effects on the psyche of man also in the form of Prem's portrayal. Prem, Rani's first husband, succumbs to an intense mental trauma due to her faithlessness. She walks out on him because of her love for Mahesh Tiwari who treats her brutally. Rani's deceit hurts his ego to the extent that he turns into a womanizer and starts changing girlfriends "like he changes his shirts"(166). Due to his loss of faith in the relationship, he chooses to enjoy life with his girlfriends but decides never to get married again. As Roshni, his daughter, said: "He was having a whale of a time, enjoying his popularity, reveling in the way women fell for him" (166). She calls her father a cheater, a liar. The impact of betrayal in marriages is not limited to the partners alone but affects the psyche and behaviour of their children as well. Be it KN or Roshni; one can easily witness their lack of warmth and love for relationships. For Devyani, Rani and KN are like "two people who had come together for mutual convenience"(158). KN tries to compensate for the loss of his

family's honor by marrying Rani, a beautiful wife: "one more possession he could be proud of"(158). His father's shameful act turns him into a silent character who, in order to relieve his mind from past, engrossed himself in business affairs. His whole childhood has been ruined, and his hatred towards his father makes him give up his surname and adopt the name of his mother's village, Navilur. His deprived and loveless childhood turns him into a mechanical human being who has no regard for love and emotions. Rani and KN are thus depicted as two alienated personalities.

KN fails to develop a strong emotional bond with his children-Neha and Rohan and creates a strange world of silence around himself. His mother, Rani, and his children fail to fill that vacuum in his heart. Whereas KN shrinks himself away from the real world, Roshni turns into a revengeful personality against her mother. She feels so estranged with her mother that she never misses a chance to belittle her: " 'She abandoned me and went to that bastard'"(169). She calls her mother a selfish woman since she is deprived of her motherly love and affection. Rani's negligence of her daughter turns her into an aggressive girl who fails to suppress her anger: "Often, I wonder why I do it..... And I swear I won't do it again. But I do. Again and again" (172). Both KN and Roshni are victims of betrayal and wrongdoing by their parents.

Rani's life also appears to be a saga of suffering, frustration, disillusionment, unfulfilled dreams, and desires. She seems to be living two lives simultaneously- one as a famous actress, and second as a simple woman as KN's wife. Her outward popularity and fame is contrasted with her inner emptiness and loneliness. She finds a genuine companion in Devyani and tries to fulfill her hidden desires with her support. She needs help to escape from the drudgery and monotonous life of Rajnur. Money has always been a prime motive in her life and the main reason behind her marriage with KN. Both belong to an entirely different world, and there is no intimacy between each other. KN's preoccupation with his business affairs left her all alone to face a boring life without any charm and prospects. Rani narrates her

desperation, rejection, and humiliation to Devyani in fragments and it was hard for Devyani to believe that such a happy face on the screen can have such a terrible past. Rani craves for that celluloid world of active work and companionship which once she was a part of: "She was missing- not being a star- but the active working, the companionship, the camaraderie" (33). Her friendship with Devyani provides her with a chance to unburden herself. She realizes her past mistakes related to marriage: " 'It's a good thing, may be. I married too early. A mistake'" (13).

Shashi Deshpande, through the character of Rani, tries to drive home a point that it is indulgence in work that brings a sort of purpose and self-fulfillment in a woman. Rani has everything in life - a lavish bungalow, car, money, lovely children, a picture perfect family, but she still feels a vacuum in her life. Her work was the only source of contentment in her life, and lack of work not only brought monotony but turns her into an irritable and passive woman. Her life has lost meaning for her. She doesn't find any solace even in the company of her children. She could share her feelings only with Devyani as she tells her: "I want it to be remembered. When I married KN I thought I would have nothing to do with films. I thought it was all over for me. When I came here and met you, when I had time to think, I got the idea that maybe I should do this one film."(241) This frustration and loneliness put her under stress. She finds Rajnur not much accommodating and had felt comfortable in Mumbai. She is not a doting mother like Savi and shows a casual attitude towards her children. She goes to Mumbai at least twice a month and leaves her children behind with her sister-in-law Uma.

Shashi Deshpande has an extraordinary skill in depicting the inner psychology of her characters. Love also creates havoc in Rani's life. She left her husband and daughter for Mahesh Tiwari, and this brings estrangement between Rani and Roshni. Roshni is also apprehensive of Rani's decision of doing films again. As she says: "She abandoned me and went to that bastard. And once she does this movie, she'll do the same to Neha and Rohan.

She'll go back to movies and leave them here." (169) The act of establishing a balance between family and employment proves to be a challenging task for women. Managing family and children on the one hand and a meaningful search for their life on the other leaves them dangling between two worlds. In spite of all these hardships, Rani doesn't lose hope and comes out triumphantly. She gets a big jolt when the producers refuse to take her in the lead role, but Devyani somehow manages to make them believe that Rani would be the perfect choice for the role in the movie. So, here again, female solidarity can be witnessed that helps the fellow beings to achieve their dreams. A discontented woman always occupies a central place in Deshpande's novels, whether it is Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Vanaa in *The Binding Vine*. They constantly waver to maintain balance and harmony between their personal and professional lives. Rani too fails to get success in both fields and keeps lamenting over past. Yet, she doesn't blame others or society for her failures. She is sure of her potential and urgency to establish her career.

The character of Sindhu offers a sharp contrast to Rani. Sindhu is the most affirmative character of the novel whose life shows grit and determination to survive all odds. In spite of suffering from breast cancer, she is full of life and zest. She wants to enjoy every bit of life. She is a perfect blend of tradition and modernity. She considers marriage as an important part of life and has firm faith in the sanctity of this institution. She keeps suggesting boys to Devi so that Devi can also make up her mind in favor of marriage. She never forces her to take a decision as she believes that the foundation of a marriage must be love. She tells Devi: "I don't believe in getting married for the sake of being married either- and then hearing for the divorce courts"(21).

Sindhu is an educated woman who believes in love and companionship. Consequently, she marries Keshav after the death of her first husband. She doesn't believe in hiding her sexual urges. She even confides in Devi that it was she who proposed Keshav and wanted Keshav also

to talk about marriage to her directly. Keshav discloses what she said: “ ‘If you want to marry me, ask me, don’t speak to my brother.’ So I said I ‘m asking you now and she said, Yes” (27). She loves her body, and like Mr. Bones in *Moving On*, she understands the significance of the body. Her love was so immense that she prefers to opt for surgery and therapy and is not afraid of the consequences she would have to face at a later stage. She wanted her body to exist and was ready to pay any price for its existence. The evolution of Deshpande’s female characters from silence to articulation is visible here in Sindhu’s character, who is bold enough to express all her physical desires candidly. She wants to tell Keshav: “don’t hold my hand, hold my breast, touch it, caress it, kiss it. It has given you and me so much pleasure, let me know that pleasure once again” (41).

The writer, through the character of Sindhu, tries to suggest that there shouldn’t be any hesitation in accepting one’s bodily urges as they are natural things. She is the one who always follows her heart. Sindhu is so full of love and cares for everyone that even a disease like cancer fails to mellow down her spirit to enjoy life. Devi also owes her inherent goodness to her aunt, Sindhu. Her lively spirit makes life possible for her loved ones as well. Although she understands the limitations of living in a patriarchal society, yet she succeeds in achieving her goals on her own terms and conditions.

Sindhu is happy in her life because she finds a lovable and genuine partner in Keshav, who like Sindhu, believes in maintaining a relationship with love, care, and concern. Sindhu-Keshav, Savi, and Shree are perfect examples of a happy marriage. Deshpande wishes to depict that genuine feelings of trust, love, sincerity, and companionship can work wonder in a person’s life and happily married couples often prove to be successful parents. Sindhu, a contented wife, is equally caring for her children and as a result, all her children are happily married and settled in their lives. Savi also marries Shree out of love, and they come out as an ideal couple. Their relatives call them beloved of Gods. True love and mutual concern are the ingredients of a

happy life, and it paves the way for secure motherhood. Unlike Rani, Savi appears to be an indulging mother who is always concerned about the well being of her children and that is why Arjun's illness creates havoc in her life. The perennial significance of love in all relationships and its role in turning them into happy individuals and families cannot be denied.

The present novel shows the development of its characters from the earlier novels from silent, conflicting and oppressive characters into those like Savi, Shree, Keshav, and Sindhu, who are happy and contented with their lives and trying to help other characters as well. The real beauty of the novel lies in the courage and determination shown by characters like Devi, Rani, Kusum and Kshama who are not fortunate enough to get happiness in their lives but still do not give up. Rani's persistent efforts to build up her identity as a successful heroine show her resisting spirit that she is not going to accept her monotonous and drab life anymore. She hopes to revive her ancient glory. Her enthusiasm for her new film, her meeting with the producer, her dream of executing her lover's idea into a movie, are all instances of her faith in her capabilities. She is full of energy and positivity when she says. " 'Yes things Pass, Divyani, things change. We lose things, but we also get things we never expected" (242).

The present novel shows a remarkable development in the sense that its major as well as minor characters exhibit a strong sense of life and are capable of taking independent decisions. They are not apprehensive about their future. They believe in living life on their terms and conditions. The novel shows a remarkable sense of articulation amongst women in the lower strata of society as well. In the earlier novels, the characters belonging to poor sections like Jeeja, Shakutai, and Sulu, were shown as meek and passive; they knew about their oppression but dared not challenge the patriarchal norms. However, in the present novel, Kusum is bold enough to resist and vocalize her oppression vehemently. She is a woman with self-respect who walks out on her husband when she comes to know about his extra-marital affair. A feeling of humiliation overcomes her. She is not ready to make a compromise with

her lot. She wants to be self-sufficient and confident enough to earn her livelihood by working as a cook. Like Devyani, she also takes responsibility for taking care of her mother. She has no regret of leaving her husband and believes in moving on against all adversities in life. This self-reliant attitude of Kusum makes her entirely different from her earlier counterparts. Then there is the character of Bhavani who, in spite of being middle-aged and having children, is eager to learn English to help her husband. Women in the present novel do not occupy secondary status but appear as a comrade for their partner. They want to be an important part of their life. This spirit of equality and freedom brings out a promise of a new beginning and the hope for the evolution a new era of comprehension between both sexes. Hence, in both the novels, the women characters can be seen as fulfilling their filial responsibilities with utmost love and care. This quality, in itself, is symbolic of a change in society. Whereas in earlier novels, men were expected to fulfill these responsibilities,, it is women who take charge of their families in the last two novels discussed in this chapter.

Life is never stagnant; it keeps on moving. Devyani, too, believes in moving on. Manjari and Devyani share many qualities with each other. Both are bold, courageous and rebel against social norms. As Manjari decides not to quit before the land mafia, Devyani also is in no mood to surrender against Naik, who wants to usurp her land. She is independent, self-reliant and has full faith in her capabilities of living a life as per her choice. She decides to live alone in her house in spite of great disapproval from her family members. She has a clear vision of life. She speaks less because she is the one who will decide what to reveal and what to hide of herself. She has the full control over her life. As Roshni says:

You're so different from most people, at least those I get to meet. You say little, but you give me a feeling of having much inside you. It's like you're living a secret, a mysterious life of your own inside; what you show the world is only what you choose to show. You're like your garden. Hidden, surprising and beautiful. (172)

Devyani is the most ambitious creation of Shashi Deshpande. She is a woman of clear perceptions who has witnessed the realities of life very minutely. As she expresses: "...Yes, I had seen birth, death, despair, and suffering; why did they call me innocent? If Ashok was doing wrong, so was I. I would not exculpate myself" (223). Like Shakespeare's Hamlet, she remains in conflict about her relationship with Ashok. S. Parveen Sulthana says in this regard: "Devani has been trapped in a mesh of cultural and psychological quelling, which does not permit her to continue the relationship with him" (640). She finds sensual pleasure and emotional bonding with Ashok, but still, she holds guilt of wrongdoing in her heart. Her contemplative nature forces her to think: "I now realized that adultery remains adultery, whoever the couple may be. That it is always riddled with guilt and fear, constantly swinging between euphoria and despair. I knew this too, that the main preoccupation of all adulterous couples is: how do we meet? And where?" (149) Devyani is imbued with enough strength to challenge the traditional norms of society. Her love for Ashok is selfless and genuine. She protests when Savi tries to reduce this affair for merely sexual purposes: "..You think only of the sex; but there's so much more. We talk, we laugh, I can say things to him I've never said to anyone, he listens to me the way no one has listened to me before, making each word of mine a precious jewel"(199-200).

For Devyani her love is the only treasure of her life. It is the most beautiful bond between the two individuals based on mutual understanding and trust. She knew it from the very beginning that she can never become Ashok's wife, but still strives hard to protect her love. She is aware that her marriage with Ashok is a 'futile dream':

A futile dream. I know that. And I also know that we could be happier than most married couples, that we could have the kind of marriage very few couples can even dream of. I hunger for him, I thirst for him. How easily you ask me to give him up. Have you any idea what he means to me? (200-201).

For Devyani, her love is so divine that she compares it with her “breath.” It is always believed that compatibility and understanding are the foundation of a happy relationship. Sweta Anand commentss: ““In her sensitive portrayal of the same, Deshpande ensures that she portrays the relationship not as a whirlwind affair or a fling meant for affording guilty pleasure, but as a subtle, sensitive relationship that proves to be the oasis for Devyani in her vast desert of mundanity” (30). Here, Deshpande tries to depict love as a potent force that makes a relationship unique and beautiful. Devyani and Ashok inhabit two different worlds. He likes jazz music, and Devi loves Hindi film songs. He can’t imagine food without meat but Devi is pure vegetarian, but when they are together nothing matters as Devi says: “I, who hated the smell of whisky, could inhale his whisky- smelling breath with ecstasy” (208). She is an honest woman, and it is her honesty that encourages her to carry on this relationship, yet she is also aware of her transgressive move which is unacceptable in the society she lives in.

Eventually, her traditional upbringing overpowers her radical thinking, and she chooses to bring her affair to an end since it would neither provide her security nor permanent happiness. She doesn’t want to be a home-breaker, though, she can’t bear even the thought of living without Ashok. She expresses: “What is my life, my future without Ashok, what do they mean without Ashok? Even the thought of living without him makes me feel like dying.” (201). Knowing that this relationship is unethical, she ultimately decides to terminate it in a dignified manner. She consoles herself that this affair might end but the memories they create together can’t be snatched away. She has no regret about her union with Ashok but realizes that it can’t go on: “Yes, I would never have known the joy, the experience of loving, of being loved, of becoming me with another human being. I wonder this union is what we long for all our lives. And you and I were lucky to have it. But we can’t go on, that is the truth, however precious it is to us, we can’t go on....” (237-238). Vinita Jha expresses her view about Devyani, “Devyani seems to be a well-developed and a round character because at last she proves her integrated

character by being honest to her own self' (184). Devyani's struggle shows a woman's struggle to live her life according to her own choice and her persistent efforts to fulfill her desires at any cost. Although they had to give up their brief moments of happiness due to their boundless faith and love for their family, but her decision to carry on her life with the help of beautiful memories and passionate moments with Ashok shows her strength. She naturally feels dejected and depressed but is enlightened with Rani's words: 'things pass, things change' (258). Her decision to move on with life keeping her memories intact symbolize her attempt to keep herself intact.

As far as the male characters of the novel are concerned, they appear to be more humane and helpful towards their partners. However, as in the earlier novels, some of the male characters also suffer due to the traditionally expected roles from a societal point of view. Devi's father, Vasant, was an idealist who believed in the motto of 'simple living and high thinking'(60). He was an intellectual too who had read Gandhi, Russell, Emerson, and Thoreau and wanted to live in the midst of nature. However, his dreams remained incomplete, and he was uncomfortable with the thought of doing a job in the bank whose owner was his father in law. He wanted to achieve success on the strength of his own capabilities. He had dreamt of building a big house, which is symbolic of his urge to establish his power and glory as a successful man. To fulfill his dream, he tried his fortunes in various spheres like in business, writing, editing and even in the field of insurance. He failed to meet with success and his male ego being hurt, he went into depression.

His desperation to earn money turned him into a superstitious man who started taking advice from an astrologer. However, even the remedies and consolations given by the astrologers brought no solace for him, and he wrapped himself into deep silence. After his marriage, he gave up his job, since he didn't want to take any favors from anybody. His failure in fulfilling his duties towards his family affected his psyche to such an extent that he was on

the verge of losing his mental balance. He struggled hard to protect his role of a provider, but he failed miserably. We come to know through Devi's memories that her father was a responsible man, completely dedicated towards his family. His false manly pride prevented him from sharing his heart even with his wife. He considered it his sole responsibility to provide sustenance to his family. Though his wife belonged to a wealthy household and was in a position to pay off his debt, but his mind was imprisoned with the patriarchal notions that it's the duty of a man to rear his family. He could not withstand his failure on this front and retreated into complete darkness. As Devyani says: "There were times when he literally retreated into darkness, when he would not allow any lights to be switched on in the house. For days we lived in the dark." (61) He is presented as a victim of orthodoxy who could not cope up with the pressures of society and ended his life abruptly.

Ashok Chinappa is the central male protagonist of the novel. He is a mature, strong and a wellsettled man. Professionally too, he is "a man with weight and substance" (157). He is a married man with a daughter. He seems to be an ardent lover and falls in love with Devyani almost instantly. He makes himself clear that he can promise her only two things- love and honesty, and it would not be wrong to say that he kept his promise till the very end of this relationship. He never compels Devyani to make any decision related to their relations and opens up new terrains of love and freedom for her. His sincerity in love is established time and again in the novel. When Devyani refuses to accept his gift on her birthday on the pretext of feeling 'cheap,' he retorts: "'You said you feel cheap. Nothing between us can be cheap. Believe me, Divya, you are precious to me. It's not only that I love you, I respect you, I respect you deeply. I would never do anything that would make you feel cheap. Believe me, Divya believe me.'" (234).

Devyani has full faith in Ashok's love for her and blooms in its shadow. It is Ashok who transforms Devyani into Divya. He comes as an emotional anchor, and she feels like a

free soul with her. He always managed to get brief moments to spend with Devyani. Neelam Sanwal Bhardwaj says about Ashok, “Ashok feels drawn to Devayani due to an attraction deeper than mere bodily desire. He wants to protect and nurture her. He wants to give her love, pleasure and emotional support” (723). He is aware of her dignified position and never thinks of doing anything that can stain their relationship. He is always keen on acquainting himself about her life, her parents, her dreams, and desires. She finds herself most comfortable, wise and vocal in his company. She felt as if she was an altogether transformed woman: “it was like I had uncorked a self who had been bottled up inside me all these years. He made me feel a young girl again. Clever, wise and witty” (188-189). It is Ashok who brings out her true character and identity.

Her defiant attitude to challenge social norms is the outcome of her faith and confidence in Ashok’s love. He seems to be vocal character who is outspoken and straightforward in everything. At the same time, he has a deep respect for Devyani’s family. He does not have any remorse for his relation with Devyani and assures Savi of his love for her: ““Your sister is very precious to me, more precious than anything else in the world.”” (220). He never insists Devyani on hiding this relationship from her family because his love for Devyani is not limited to sexual urges only. As he says: ““I have never thought of you as a body to enjoy, to have sex with. The first time I saw you, it was your face, the way you looked....I may sound like a fool, but I felt I had found something I had been looking for all my life. You’re my Divya you’re my love” (234). He candidly admits of his relationship with other women too but also assures her that they were nowhere as precious and unique as it was with her: “I’ve had other women, yes, I admit it, but I have never felt this way, there has never been anything like this.What I feel for you is...is...Loving your body is part of my love for you, only a part. Believe me, Divya, believe me, you’re precious to me.”(234).

He is even ready to leave his wife and daughter to prove his love. He is portrayed as a strong character who is ready to break all traditions to assure his relationship with Devyani forever. Devyani, however, understands his responsibilities as well as her precarious situation. She turns back saying: "I have never thought of it.... your commitments are stronger, more binding. I am very clear about it- I have no claim on your life. There is no future for us" (236-37). Ashok thus comes out as a triumphant character who is able to win the heart of his beloved. He emerges as a powerful character with a sensitive approach to life and plays an important role in evolving the character of Devyani.

So in the novel, *In the Country of Deceit*, there is an attempt to create a new world for both men and women, whereas in the earlier novels, the action was limited to the level of thought only. The characters in the novel seem to be in charge of their destinies. They are confident enough to live a life of their own, and what is most significant is, that they are not regretful about their decisions. They are determined, vibrant and challenge social norms in various aspects. They are dynamic characters who believe in enjoying life to the fullest. Whether it is major characters or minor, the resilient spirit is perceptible in their actions, and they are ready to face life with courage and determination. Characters like Kusum, Devyani, Sindhu exhibit tremendous qualities of head and heart. They are even ready to be accountable for their failures, but they do not lose heart and fight against the challenges of life.

The character of Devyani surpasses all other characters of earlier novels in displaying positive outlook towards life. She is independent and bold enough to take her own decisions and strive hard to attain their freedom and individuality. What makes her unique is that she owns her mistakes and does not believe in blaming others. At the same time, she is aware of her choices and know that she will have to bear the consequences of those choices. So she comes out as winner in the true sense. The novel present a world where people are aware of their shortcomings and failures but instead of giving up, they take a lesson from their past

mistakes and create a new world of affirmation. They try to understand things from a more human perspective and rather than indulging in any blame game; they try to evolve a new equation based on love and understanding. The writer demarcates the fluctuations of the ego in her characters amidst the pressures of the regressive tradition and culture on them, yet one finds an obvious evolution in her male and female characters as depicted in her later novels. They are more articulate and sensitive to the voice of their heart and are in a position to break various shackles to declare their independence.

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